



Theme: The Many Faces of David


“A Shepherd’s Heart”


Weekly Memory Verse:

¹ The Lord is my shepherd;

I have all that I need. – Psalm 23:1

Monday, August 22 – Read 1 Samuel 10:1-2 and 17-24 1. Samuel chapters 8 to 11 offer a series of stories about how Saul became Israel’s first king. They do not seem to fit a neat linear sequence. At the end of one, Saul is king, but in the next he is not yet and has to prove himself. Scholar John Goldingay wrote in his commentary *1 and 2 Samuel for Everyone*, “When God inspired the composing of 1 Samuel, the people God used as compilers apparently went about the task by simply placing end to end various stories; neither God nor they were too worried about the way the stories link with one another in narrative terms.”

 We read in 1 Samuel 10:19 today, and other sections of chapters 8 – 11, that Israel was rejecting God by asking for a king. But Judges 17:6 and 21:25 remind us that having no king had not worked well either. Combined, the stories seemed to stress the human urge to rest undue hopes on any system or set of human leaders. How have you learned to live as a good citizen in a world where God’s kingdom does not fully reign, yet with your ultimate loyalty to God rather than any flawed human leader or government?

 Verses 23-24 suggest the reason the Israelite people hailed Saul as their king. He had an imposing physical air in that he, “looked the part of a king.” This was essential background to the story we’ll read in a couple of days when David’s is anointed as king. In what ways do people today still often judge potential leaders in any field mainly on external criteria, and often miss other important qualities for good or ill?

Prayer: *Dear God, you are my one true king. Preserve me from the urge to give any human leader the profound heart allegiance that I owe only to you. Amen.*

Tuesday, August 23 – Read 1 Samuel 13:5-15 and 15:34-16:1. Samuel was a great transitional figure for Israel. He was called judge in 1 Samuel 7:15-16, prophet in 1 Samuel 3:20, priest in 1 Samuel 2:18 and Psalm 99:6. It was he who sensed God’s leading to anoint tall, handsome Saul as Israel’s first king. But, to his great sadness, he later had to bluntly tell Saul that his many bad, self-serving choices had ruined Saul’s family’s place as Israel’s royal family.



If God led Samuel to make Saul king, how could Saul possibly have gone bad? Our Methodist tradition was founded by John Wesley who believed what Scripture teaches, that even if God calls us, that doesn't cancel our moral freedom, the ability to make real choices with real results. Jesus prayed all night before choosing 12 apostles in Luke 6:12-16. One of those, Judas Iscariot, chose to betray him! How are you using your freedom to either respond to God's calling or to reject it?



In 1 Samuel 8:5, the Israelites demanded that Samuel name a king, "like all the other nations have". Yet, unlike other Middle Eastern nations, Israel never had an absolute monarchy. The moral authority for the nation of Israel rested with prophets such as Samuel, Elijah, Nathan, or Jeremiah. They always checked and challenged the kings. In what ways can we as Christians, living in very different conditions, still serve as prophetic salt and light in our community's life?

Prayer: *Lord God, thank you for the scary, priceless gift of freedom—the ability to make moral choices with real consequences for good or ill. Help me to use my freedom to serve you more faithfully than Saul did. Amen.*

Wednesday, August 24 – Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13. God sent Samuel to anoint Israel's NEXT king with Saul still king, which was no doubt seen as treason in Saul's eyes. We read that Saul looked kingly in 1 Samuel 10:23-24, and so did Jesse's first son Eliab. Based on his looks, Samuel figured Eliab was God's choice as the next king. But God wanted a true king on the INSIDE, not just one who looked regal. David's early life as the youngest of eight brothers must have been painful. His father didn't value David enough to include him among "his sons" to meet Samuel; didn't even use his name in verse 11. But Jesse's opinion didn't limit God. Today millions know about David who never heard of the 7 other sons.




Because of Psalm 23, which David likely wrote, and Jesus' calling himself the good shepherd in John 10, we often assign a certain "halo" to shepherds. But in David's day, and much of the Middle East today and in the first century, shepherds had very low social status. Have you ever, either years ago or 10 minutes ago, felt that you're not valued, that nothing about you is anything the world needs? How does the story of God choosing David, the left-out kid brother, speak to you?




The Hebrew historian wrote that after Samuel anointed David, "The Lord's spirit came over David from that point forward." The same history told of some awful mistakes David made. Tradition connected both the serene Psalm 23 and the deeply remorseful Psalm 51 with David's name. How have you learned the need to daily renew your loyalty to God? What makes it vital for you, like David, to remember that even when you badly miss the path, God always offers mercy and a fresh start?

Prayer: *Lord God, you make beautiful things out of the dust. You worked through Samuel to call forth the potential and talent no one else had seen in David. I place my life in your hands. Make of me all that you can, to your glory. Amen.*


Thursday, August 25 – Read Psalm 23:1-3. King David, who we read about being a shepherd in 1 Samuel 17:34-36, likely wrote Psalm 23. You might try reading multiple versions of the Psalm on the web if the words need to be refreshed. The psalm said poetically that God is the Shepherd of our souls who guides us through life's ups and downs. This beloved Psalm never looked at what anyone else had. It rejoiced in the abundance that came from God's presence with the psalmist—a reality each of us can experience.


 David said God guided him, and will guide all God's children, along the right path. How much of "the weight of the world" do you carry on your shoulders? How (if at all) have you learned to put down that load, and rest in God's loving care? Do patience and trust in God's faithful shepherding make sense in our "now" world where many of us ask, "What have you done for me lately"? Can you trust God even when you're not seeing any immediate results? If so, why?

 Verse 1 is traditionally translated "I shall not want." Modern versions say, "I have all I need," or "I lack nothing." This is our memory verse for this week. Since this psalm seemed to reflect David's days as a shepherd and an ignored kid brother rather than as King of Israel, how do you believe it defined, "all that I need"? How often can you honestly say you feel that you have all you need?

Prayer: *Dear God, because you are my shepherd, I have all I need. I am eternally safe in your arms. Help me more fully find the inner peace that comes from that reality. Amen.*


Friday, August 26 – Read Psalm 23:4-6. We sometimes read the words of Psalm 23:1-3 about "grassy meadows" and "restful waters" as if it described a luxury vacation. But grass and meadows are the basic stuff of survival sheep need! Scholar John Goldingay wrote in *Psalms for Everyone, Part 1*, "In the second half of the psalm, literal reality pokes through. The psalm is encouraging us to declare our trust that we can face being threatened by the human equivalent of bears, rattlesnakes, and cougars (compare the bulls, steers, lions, and dogs of Psalm 22), because God protects us with his club like a shepherd protecting his sheep."


 Go through today's reading slowly and prayerfully. After each phrase, ask yourself, "Is this really true for me, and not just religious talk?" Consider how important of each of these things is, compared to whatever items are at the top of your current personal "wish list." For each phrase you have internalized, and can honestly say you believe, thank God.

 We most often think something "pursuing" us is bad. Psalm 23:6 reversed that, saying, "Goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life." Were there times when you, like so many people, tried to ignore or avoid God's presence? In what ways have God's goodness and faithful love pursued you even if you tried to get away from them?

Prayer: *O God, I'd like a sunny, easy life, with no dark, dangerous valleys in it. And you never promise me that—but you pledge to be with me at even the darkest moments. When the darkness deepens, teach me how to hold more tightly to your hand. Amen.*

Saturday, August 27 – Read John 10:1-15. We read Psalm 23 the last two days. Ezekiel, a prophet among Hebrews in the dark days of their exile in Babylon, called God a good shepherd in Ezekiel 34:16 who would "seek out the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the wounded, and strengthen the weak." Jesus picked up those images as he reached out to the lost and the strays, bound up our wounds and took special interest in the weak. He didn't just say he was the Good Shepherd. In the end, he did indeed give up his life for the sheep—us.

 Shepherds had to know their flock's needs and lead them toward safety. Shepherds walked before their flock and the sheep learned to recognize their voice. Jesus compared himself to a shepherd. In what ways have you let Jesus lead you like a shepherd? Jesus said his "sheep" listen for His voice. How can you listen for Jesus' voice today?

 Jesus' shepherd image assumed a bond of deep trust. Sheep HAVE TO trust their shepherd for well-being and safety. How much of the hectic pace of our lives grows from our efforts to ensure that we and those we love are safe and provided for? How can learning to trust that Jesus has already provided for the eternal security of all the people

we love (including ourselves) help us learn to rest in him, to live less hectically and with greater peace?

Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for leading me every day. Even if I struggle to hear your voice, I trust that you're there as the shepherd of my soul. Help me to find the path you've set before me. Amen.*